THE MORAL SYSTEM OF ISLAM

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Islam has laid down for humanity universal fundamental rights that are to be observed and respected under all circumstances. So that these rights can be realized in one's daily and social life, Islam provides both legal safeguards and a very effective moral system In beef, whatever improves the well-being of an individual or a society is morally good, and whatever harms this well-being is morally bad.

Islam attaches so much importance to one s love of God and love of fellow human beings that it discourages excessive formalism. We read in the Qur'an:

> *It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in God and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers, to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves, to be steadfast in prayers, and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which you made; and to be firm and patient in pain (or suffering) and adversity and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God-fearing. (2:177)*

We are given a beautiful description of the righteous and the religiously committed individual in these verses. He should obey salutary regulations but fix his gaze on the love of God and the love of humanity An individual's faith should be true and sincere. We must be prepared to show it in deeds of charity to other people and by living as good citizens and supporters of social organizations. Finally, our own individual faith must remain firm and unshaken in all circumstances.

This is the standard by which a particular mode of conduct can be classified as either good or bad. It also provides the nucleus around which an individual's as well as a societies moral code should revolve. Before laying down any moral injunctions, Islam seeks to implant firmly in man's heart the conviction that his dealings are with God, who sees him at all times and in all places. While he may hide himself from others or deceive them, he cannot do so with God.

Islam teaches that the objective of one's life is to live a life that is pleasing to God. To make such a goal possible,

Islam has provided mankind with the highest possible standard of morality This moral code, which is both straightforward and practical, provides the individual with innumerable ways to embark upon and then continue the path of moral evolution. By making divine revelation the primary source of knowledge, moral standards are made permanent and stable. This does not make them inflexible, however, for there is room for reasonable adjustment and adaptation when needed. The danger of moral relativism, now so widespread in many societies, is thereby avoided. Another benefit is the gradual internalization of these moral standards, for one seeks to obey them voluntarily to please God, not because some government or people tell him to do so. An individual's belief in God, when added to his belief in the Day of Judgment, is a powerful motivating factor for one to live a highly moral life.

Islam does not provide any novel moral virtues, nor does it seek to minimize the importance of traditional and commonly accepted moral norms or give exaggerated importance to some and neglect others. The Islamic moral code incorporates all of the commonly accepted moral virtues and then endows them with a sense of balance and proportion by assigning each one a suitable place and function in the total scheme of life. It widens the scope of man's individual and collective life by dealing with his domestic associations, his civic conduct, and his activities in the political, economic, legal, educational, and social realms. It covers his life from the home to the society, from the dining table to the battlefield and peace conferences-in short, from the cradle to the grave-for no sphere of life is exempt from the universal and comprehensive application of the moral principles of Islam. It makes morality reign supreme and ensures that the affairs of life are regulated by moral norms and not dominated by selfish desires and petty interests.

A major goal of Islam is to provide mankind with a practical and realistic system of life based on good by which he can conduct his life. It calls upon mankind not only to practice virtue but to establish it and to eradicate all that is harmful. It seeks the supremacy of one's conscience in all matters, so that what is harmful cannot gain the upper hand in either an individual's or a society's life. Those who respond to this call are known as Muslims, which literally means those who have submitted to God. The sole object of the resulting

community of Muslims (the ummah) is the undertaking of an organized effort to establish what is good and to fight and eradicate what is evil and harmful.

Several of Islam's basic moral teachings are given below. They cover the broad spectrum of a Muslim's personal moral conduct as well as his social responsibilities.

God-Consciousness

The Qur'an mentions God-consciousness as the highest quality of a Muslim: The most honorable among you in the sight of God is the one who is most God-conscious. (49:13) Humility modesty control of passions and desires, truthfulness, integrity, patience, steadfastness, and fulfilling one's promises-all of these are moral values that are mentioned manyh times in the Qur'an: And God loves those who are firm and steadfast (3:14Q. The Qur'an also tells Muslims:

> *And vie with one another to attain your Sustainer's forgiveness and a Paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, which awaits the God conscious, who spend for charity in time of plenty and in time of hardship, and restrain their anger and pardon their fellow men, for God loves those who do good. (3:133134)*

> *Establish regular prayer, enjoin what is just, and forbid what is wrong; and bear patiently whatever may befall you;for this is true constancy And do not swell your (cheek with puce) at men, nor walk in insolence on the earth, for God does not love any man proud and boastful. And be moderate in your pace and lower your voice;for the harshest of sounds, indeed, is the braying of the ass. (31:18-19)*

The moral behavior of a committed Muslim can be summarized by the following statement of the Prophet:

> *My Sustainer has given me nine commands: to remain c conscious of God in private and in public; to speak justly whether angry or pleased; to show moderation when poor or rich; to re kindle friendship with those who have broken it off with me; to give to him who refuses me; that my silence should*

be occupied with thought; that my looking should be an admonition; and that I should command what is right.

Social Responsibilities

The teachings of Islam concerning social responsibilities are based on kindness and consideration for others. So that these broad injections will not be ignored in specific situations, Islam stresses specific acts of kindness and defines the responsibilities and rights that belong to various relationships. Our first obligation is to our immediate family-parents, spouse, and children, then to other relatives, neighbors, friends and acquaintances, orphans and widows, the needy of the community, our fellow Muslims, our fellow human beings and animals.

Parents

Respect and care for parents is a very important part of a Muslims expression of faith.

> *Your Sustainer has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in your life-time, do not say to them a word of contempt nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor and, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility and say: My Sustainer! Bestow on them Your mercy, even as they cherished me in childhood. (17:23-24)*

Other Relatives

And render to the relatives their due rights, as (also) to those in need, and to the traveler; and do not squander your wealth in the manner of a spendthrift. (7:26)

Neighbors

The Prophet said: "He is not a believer who eats his fill when his neighbor beside him is hungry" and "He does not believe whose neighbors are not safe from his injurious conduct."

Actually, according to the Qur'an and example of the Prophet, a Muslim has to discharge his moral responsibility not only to his parents, relatives, and neighbors but to all mankind, animals, and useful trees and plants. For example, the hunting of birds and animals for sport is not permitted. Similarly, cutting trees and plants that yield fruit is forbidden unless there is a very pressing need for one to do so.

Thus, on the basic moral plane, Islam provides mankind with a higher system of morality that can be used by an individual to realize his greatest potential. Islam purifies the soul of self-seeking egotism, tyranny, wantonness, and lack of discipline. It creates God-fearing men who are devoted to their ideals, motivated by piety, abstinence, and discipline, and unable to make any compromise with falsehood. It induces feelings of moral responsibility and fosters the capacity for self-control. Islam generates kindness, generosity, mercy, sympathy, peace, disinterested goodwill, scrupulous fairness, and truthfulness towards all creation in all situations. It nourishes noble qualities from which only good may be expected.